

A  
L E T T E R  
TO THE  
PEOPLE CALLED QUAKERS,  
ON THE  
PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES TO THEM  
OF A  
REPEAL OF THE CORPORATION  
AND  
T E S T A C T S.

*By Henry James Pye Esq.*

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THE example of all ages has shewn us, that while the ambitious and the turbulent have been ever desirous of innovation, and anxious to forward their own power and interest by every mean within their reach, the virtuous and the peaceful citizen has been slowly animated to a defence even of his own rights, and an opposition to those violent spirits who wish to overturn them; and it has seldom happened, till they are roused by repeated attacks, or alarmed by the threats of immediate danger, that the friends of good order (without



which no real liberty can exist) have been tempted to exert themselves against the efforts of their insidious and persevering enemies.

But if this is true of mankind in general, how much more is it applicable to you whom I now address. Holding, from conscientious motives, those objects as impious which the rest of the world look up to with eager expectation, and forbidden to use force in defence of yourselves, how necessary is it for you to employ those peaceful methods which your religion does authorise to ~~op~~pose a measure which must disturb that quiet you now enjoy; and by the peaceful, but firm, exercise of those rights which the law of England gives you, and which are sanctioned, even by your own strict construction of the gospel of Christ, to endeavour to oppose the ambitious purposes of those sects who, not content with toleration  
them-

selves in the most \* unlimited degree, are trying to establish their own power on principles that must subject you to oppression and persecution.

I need not hint to you the great lenity with which your tenets have been treated by the present establishment; or remind you how much our laws have respected your religious scruples, by even altering the forms of justice in your favour; since your mild and peaceable demeanour, as citizens, shews you are not forgetful of the favour you have received, and the unimpeached fidelity of your judicial testimony shews, you have merited that confidence which was placed in your truth and integrity.

\* I believe it will be difficult in any country to find a toleration equal to that experienced by every sect of protestant dissenters in this. Every place of their religious worship is equally protected with the natural church; the same penalty that would be incurred by insulting an Archbishop in his metropolitan cathedral, would be incurred by insulting a preacher in a dissenting meeting-house.

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But these indulgencies, however just and reasonable they may be, which you now enjoy as a consequence of the unlimited toleration, congenial with the mild doctrines of the church of England, and the free spirit of the British constitution, can never be granted, if those principles are granted on which the other dissenters found their right of a participation in offices of power, of trust and of emolument, with the members of the established church. The foundation on which they ground their claim to such a participation, is this, that religious opinions have no connection with civil or political affairs; and whatever singularities a man may have, not only in his private sentiments, but in the exterior acts of devotion; and however he may find himself obliged to separate himself from the religious or civil forms prescribed in any case by the laws of his country; he has still a perfect unalienable claim to the exercise of



of every public trust, though he is absolutely incapable of giving that security for its due discharge, which hitherto mankind (in their idea it seems erroneously) have thought themselves justified in demanding of those whom they employ in any public concern, or to whom they confide any part of the public welfare.

Let us now examine this doctrine, and see how far, if it is established, you will be affected by it. In the case of Allen Evans it was observed from the bench, that immunity from serving some offices <sup>x</sup> counterbalances the inability of serving others. Indeed this is so obvious, that places of emolument are not more eagerly sought after, than places of trouble are avoided. Every one conversant in provincial affairs knows, that as much sollicitation is used to be <sup>exercised</sup> ~~exercised~~ serving as a juryman or a constable, as to be appointed an assessor of the land-tax, or an excise-

excifeman, and an incapacity for either is always pleaded as a valuable privilege; while, in the higher ranks, as much pains and as much interest are often exerted to be excused from serving the office of high fheriff, as to attain that fummit of provincial ambition, the representation of a county; and perfons have been called to the bar, and have accepted commissions in the militia, for the sole purpose of being exempted from it. And this confideration, were I to enter at large into the fubject, would appear a full confutation of the notion, that any difgrace is incurred by the prefent preclufion of the diffenters; fince people are anxious to prove their incapacity to difcharge a duty on which the property and the lives of their fellow-fubjects depend: and an exemption from the honor, together with the trouble and expence of filling the higheft executive office in their county, is held out as an advantage to  
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the professors of the law, and the officers of the only permanent and constitutional force of the country. But it is not my design now to examine the general question of the Test Act. I only mean to shew how far you in particular will be affected by its repeal.

The Protestant Dissenters, who are so anxious to attain this point, are no doubt well aware of the circumstances I have mentioned. As they are not of that description of men who act without a due regard to their own interest, they are certainly well apprized of the advantages and disadvantages of immunity and disability; and, after well weighing one against the other, are perfectly ready to be liable to the burthen of one kind of office, that they may enjoy the influence and the emoluments attendant on the other. But you are in a very different predicament. You have no such balance  
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to strike. Offices of honor and profit, are equally burthensome to you with those of trouble and expence; and the compulsion to serve one can never be compensated by an equally disagreeable compulsion, according to your religious principles, to accept the other; since an exemption, or, if you will, an exclusion from both, is the greatest favor you can receive from any government under which you live.

If then the principles laid down by the other dissenters are true, that no religious opinions, manifested by any outward act, ought to preclude men from being employed by the community in offices of trust; though a refusal to give that security, which the community chooses to exact for a due and conscientious discharge of their duty, makes a part of their religious principles: The door of civil and military employment will

will certainly be open to you; and on the fair grounds, that all who are eligible to offices of emolument should be liable to accept offices of expence, and that no man who is eligible to either, has a right to refuse them, you will be compelled to enter; and the greatest favor you can expect will be a permission to commute, for a pecuniary fine, the obligation of personal service, when you are legally nominated to any public duty. And this will fall particularly hard on you; for even to submit to such pecuniary commutation, is contrary to the strictness of your religious opinions; and you often suffer yourselves to be compelled by a legal process, before you ~~will~~ will comply: A mode of proceeding generally performed with the greatest delicacy, but which is liable to be made an engine of great oppression; and, in its mildest form, is what every lover of civil



civil liberty, or domestic quiet, would be sorry to see multiplied. You will also lie under another particular hardship; all legal power being in the hands of others, the nomination to office will fall to those who, without a wish to persecute, will be rather inclinable to favor their own friends. I say, even if they have not the wish to persecute; but that even such a wish may not sometimes prevail, who, that knows any thing of the history of mankind, will venture to pronounce; and if ever the case should happen, that pecuniary commutation would be more convenient than personal service, men will be too apt to fix on those who, from their incapability of one, will be compelled to have recourse to the other.

If these consequences are to be feared from the Dissenters carrying that point they have so much at heart, the repeal of  
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the Corporation and Test Acts, it is surely a duty you owe to yourselves and your posterity, who will most likely be in general of the same religious persuasion, to avert them as much as possible, by exerting every power the constitution invests you with, and your own religious opinions do not condemn; and particularly to make use of the right of electing representatives which the law allows you, and your extensive property gives you in no small degree, in such a manner, that those men may be the objects of your choice, who will not sacrifice the tranquillity of society to the ambitious designs of a few sectaries, who, while they boast of having the praises of God in their mouth, are desirous of holding a two-edged sword in their hand; and who, while they resist the efforts of those who are so anxious to enjoy

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enjoy the fruits of temporal dominion,  
will be studious to preserve to you the  
indulgencies which now you enjoy under  
a free and general toleration.

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